Getting Comfortable with the Windows 7 Desktop

Chapter 1

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Microsoft Windows 7 is a special type of program or software — tools for getting things done with a computer — called an *operating system*, which is the master control of a computer. Windows 7 gives a computer essential functions that enable you to run other programs and work with documents, photos, and music.

Whether you already have a computer or you intend to buy a new computer with Windows 7 installed, this chapter takes you into Windows 7 for the first time, from turning the computer on, looking around, to turning it off again.

Get familiar with common terms and concepts, such as the *desktop*, which you see soon after you start. Use the *Start menu* to start programs. Take advantage of the *taskbar* to see what's going on. You work with these parts of Windows 7 every time you use your computer.

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In the process of exploring the major features of Windows 7 for the first time, come to grips with the mouse, your pet for prodding Windows 7 into action. The mouse and its buttons enable you to point and click your way to happiness. From time to time, I emphasize when the keyboard provides a good alternative to the using the mouse.

Get a New Computer with Windows 7

Although this is not the book to tell you everything there is to know about buying a new computer, I do have a few suggestions for you as you shop. The first consideration is what style or size of computer do you want? Choose from these types of computers (see **Figure 1-1**):

Desktop Laptop Netbook

Figure 1-1

- A **desktop computer** is usually shoebox sized or larger. Often, a desktop computer is a vertical tower that sits under a desk or table. This desktop box usually accepts numerous hardware upgrades internally, but not everyone wants to open the box and insert new hardware. A desktop has a separate *screen* (also called a *display* or *monitor*) that displays what the computer is doing, a keyboard for typing, plus a mouse for doing things onscreen. (More on these components shortly.)

- A **laptop computer** is not only smaller than most desktop computers, it is portable. Even if you never intend to leave the house with your computer, you may enjoy taking the computer from one room to another. A desktop computer requires you to connect

a few different parts during setup. A laptop computer is ready to go when you get it.

- A **netbook** is a small laptop computer that may be less powerful than a more expensive laptop. A netbook is a great *beginner's computer* because netbooks are much cheaper than other machines ($250 to $400). The small size of a netbook may suit you perfectly, but look closely at the size of any laptop or netbook. Is the computer too big to carry comfortably? Will your hands fit the keyboard?

In the rest of the book, when I use the words computer or machine, I mean any style of computer. I use the words desktop or laptop (including netbook) to emphasize differences between those machines, as needed.

For more information on buying a computer, see *Computer For Seniors For Dummies*, by Nancy C. Muir.

When you buy a new computer, check the ad or the box or talk with a salesperson to find out whether that computer comes with Microsoft Windows 7 installed. Ask which *edition* you're buying. The various editions of Windows 7 have different features and capabilities. You are most likely to see one of these editions:

- **Starter Edition:** Many of the Windows 7 visual effects are missing from the Starter Edition, and so are some of the useful accessories discussed in Chapter 5. This edition may be too stripped down to give you the real benefits of using Windows 7.

- **Home Premium Edition:** This is a good choice for most computer users and is likely to be the version already installed if you are buying a new PC. It has media options, such as music and video. Home Premium supports all the slick visual effects of Windows 7. Some people dismiss these visual effects as eye-candy, but these effects, such as semi-transparent

objects onscreen and rich colors, are part of the fun of using Windows 7.

- **Ultimate Edition:** This version has everything Windows 7 can provide. (The name says as much.) Ultimate may include some advanced features — including options for backing up your files — that you won't immediately need. This is the Edition that *may* impress your teen-aged kids or grandkids, if anything does.

Through a program called Windows Anytime Upgrade, you can upgrade from Starter to Home Premium or Ultimate. See Chapter 17 for more information.

You can buy a DVD with Windows 7 and use that to install Windows 7 on an older computer that currently uses Windows XP or Vista. Sometimes, upgrades work flawlessly; but the older the computer, the greater the odds that some hardware or software won't work with the brand new Windows 7. It is often more reliable to get a new version of Windows on a new computer. (At least, that's what the marketing department says.)

Turn On Your Computer

1. If your computer is a laptop, find the latch on the front edge of the computer that releases the screen from the keyboard. You may need to push the latch in or slide it to the right to open the laptop. Raise the lid so you can see the screen and the keyboard.

2. Locate the power switch. On most laptops, the switch is located near one of the hinges of the lid. On a desktop computer, the power switch is usually on the front of the computer box or tower (see **Figure 1-2**). Push in or slide

the power switch from left to right; then release the switch to turn on the computer. You should hear some noise from the fan or see lights on the keyboard or screen soon after you turn it on.

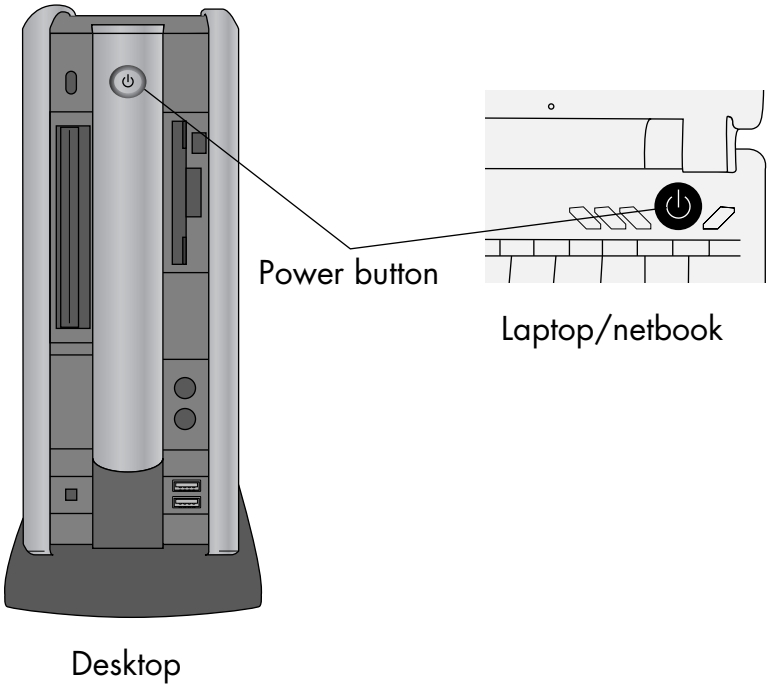
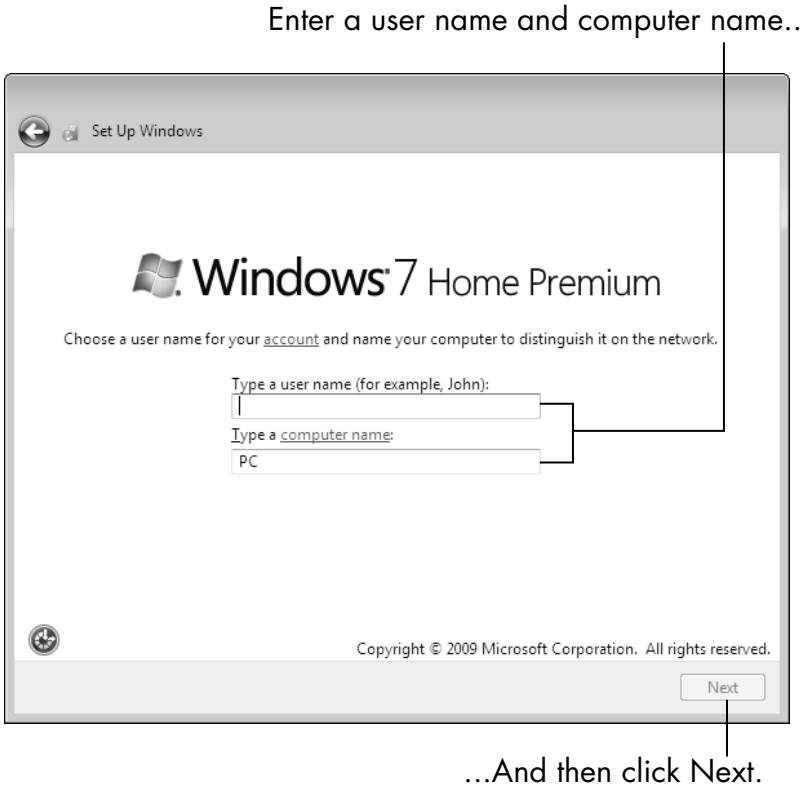


Figure 1-2

3. The very first time you turn on a computer running Windows 7, you may have to create a user account with the following information:

- **User name and computer name:** Your user name appears throughout the system, from the log-in screen to the Start menu to the folder containing all your documents. Use a simple, clear name. Your first name is just fine. Your computer needs a name, as well. Windows 7 suggests your user name plus **-PC**, but you can change that, if you wish. (See **Figure 1-3**.) Click Next.


Enter a user name and computer name...
Set Up Windows
Windows 7 Home Premium
Choose a user name for your account and name your computer to distinguish it on the network.
Type a user name (for example, John):
Type a computer name:
PC
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Next
...And then click Next.

Figure 1-3

- **Password:** A password is an optional security measure. If you enter a password when you create your user account, that password is required each time you start the computer. If someone other than you tries to start your computer, he or she will have to know (or guess) the password to get into your files. (Don't put your password on a note stuck to the computer or nearby.) Click Next.

For home computers, passwords may be unnecessary unless you need to keep someone else in the house out of your business. Laptop users should always create a password, however, because it is easy to lose a laptop. Don't make it easy for a thief to use your computer.

- **Use Recommended Settings:** After the password screen, you select settings for updating and securing Windows 7. Click Use Recommended Settings.

- **Date and Time Settings:** Select your time zone. Check or uncheck Automatically Adjust for Daylight Saving Time, as appropriate. Confirm the current time. Click Next.

- **Select Your Computer's Current Location:** Your computer may detect an Internet connection automatically. If you are at home, click Home Network. Otherwise, click Public Network. See Chapter 8 for more information about network connections.

After the initial setup, every time you turn on the computer, you may be asked to log in under the user account you created in Step 3, including a password if you created one. If you are the only user of the computer and did not create a password, Windows 7 logs you in automatically.

Check Out the Windows 7 Desktop

1. After you turn on the computer and log in with your user name and (if necessary) password, you see a screen indicating that Windows is starting. Then you see the Windows desktop. **Figure 1-4** shows a common desktop setup, although yours may be different.

Often, an interesting picture or photo is displayed on the desktop. You see how to change this picture in Chapter 14.

Figure 1-4

2. Examine your desktop for *icons* — small pictures that represent programs, which perform functions, or documents such as letters and photos. Icons provide a way to run a program or open a document. The Windows 7 desktop displays an icon for the Recycle Bin, where deleted documents go. The Recycle Bin may be the only icon on your desktop, or you may see others.

3. Finally, the desktop displays *gadgets,* which are usually larger than icons. Gadgets display information, such as the time (in a clock) or the current weather report. See Chapter 5 for more about using gadgets.

Try Out the Mouse

1. If your computer came with a mouse pad, which is a thin, flexible rectangle with a very smooth surface, place the mouse pad under the mouse.

2. Move the mouse, which is typically about the size of a bar of soap and has two buttons at one end. Your mouse may have a wheel between the buttons. Use the wheel in long documents or on Web pages (see Chapter 9) to scroll to areas below or above the area displayed on your screen.

Hold the mouse gently so that you can click either button easily without having to reposition your hand.

Instead of a mouse, a laptop usually has a *touchpad* — a small rectangle below the keys on the keyboard with buttons below it that do the same things as the mouse buttons. Drag your index finger over the touchpad to move the mouse pointer (see Step 3) over the screen.

You can use more than one mouse or other pointing device with any computer. If your current mouse is too small or big or hard to use, buy a wireless mouse. In addition to mice, other pointing devices include trackballs, which you roll to move the mouse pointer, and pens that you use on a separate tablet or directly on the screen.

3. As you move the mouse, an arrow called the *mouse pointer* moves on your computer screen (see **Figure 1-5**). Try moving that pointer over the screen. With experience, you'll become very comfortable using the mouse. For practice, pat your head while rubbing your stomach.

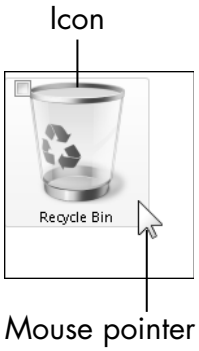

Figure 1-5

4. Try out the mouse or touchpad buttons in the following ways:

- Move the mouse pointer on top of an icon or gadget on the desktop, such as the Recycle Bin. Let the mouse pointer sit there for a moment — this is *hovering* — you may see a pop-up message (called a *tooltip*) with information about the icon you hover over. Press and release (*click*) the left mouse button. This action highlights, or *selects*, that icon or gadget. As you work with *menus*, which are lists of items (see Chapter 3), you put the mouse pointer on the menu item you intend to use and then click the left mouse button to select the item.

In this book, when you see the words *point* or *hover*, they mean move the mouse pointer to the specified location but don't click. The word *click* means a single, quick press and release of the left mouse button. A *double-click* is two rapid clicks of the left mouse button. A *right-click* is a single press and release of the right mouse button.

- Place the mouse pointer on an icon and then double-click the left mouse button to open the object associated with that icon, such as an e-mail program or a document that you want to read, edit, or print.

Sometimes you don't know for sure whether you need to click or double-click. One way to tell is to hover over the icon you want to use. Often, a little bit of help info pops up, telling you what the icon is for (see "Get Help When You Need It," later in this chapter). Then click the left mouse button to see whether anything happens. If nothing does, double-click the icon. In other words, you may not always have to double-click to open a document or run a program, so don't assume that you have to until you get more familiar with when one click is sufficient.

- Place your mouse pointer over any object on the screen and right-click (click the right mouse button one time). You see a menu of *options,* related to the item your mouse pointer is over. This menu is called a *context menu* because it changes with the context or the position of the mouse pointer and is different for different items. Right-clicking a photograph's icon, for example, displays a menu of options for viewing that photo, and right-clicking a music file's icon displays a menu of options for playing the music. A few options, such as Open and Properties, appear in most context menus, but others change depending on the context (what the mouse pointer is pointing at).

The right mouse button is the key to the kingdom because of context menus. Try right-clicking various areas of the screen. You almost never double-click the right mouse button, though.

5. With the mouse pointer over an icon, such as the Recycle Bin, click and hold down the left mouse button; then move the mouse to the right or down the screen. As you move the mouse, the icon moves in the same direction on the screen. This process is called *click and drag*. When you release the left mouse button, the icon stays where

you moved it. Click and drag the Recycle Bin or any other icons you see on the desktop to some other places on the desktop. Fun, huh?

6. You can also click and drag with the right mouse button. Hover the mouse pointer over an icon, such as the Recycle Bin or any other icon or gadget on the desktop; click and hold down the right mouse button; and move the mouse. When you release the right mouse button, a small context menu pops up. You use this menu to copy or move documents in Chapter 4.

If you have a laptop, you can click, double-click, and click and drag by using your finger on a touchpad and the buttons near it. Keep in mind, too, that you can use a mouse with a laptop (though it's not easy if you have the laptop on your lap!).

Go with the Start Button

1. The Start button, located in the bottom-left corner of the screen, provides easy access to all the programs you use. This circular button displays the Windows logo — a four-colored flag. Click the Start button to display the Start menu, which is a list of options (see **Figure 1-6**).

2. Move your mouse pointer slowly over each item on the left side of the menu. As you hover, some menu items display a tooltip. A menu item with a triangle to the right displays a pop-out list called a *jump list*. See Chapter 15 for more information about using jump lists.

3. Click the All Programs item to display a menu of all the available programs on your computer.

4. On the All Programs menu, find a yellow icon for Games or Accessories, and click that icon to display more programs. (Later, to play a game or open an accessory, you click its name.)

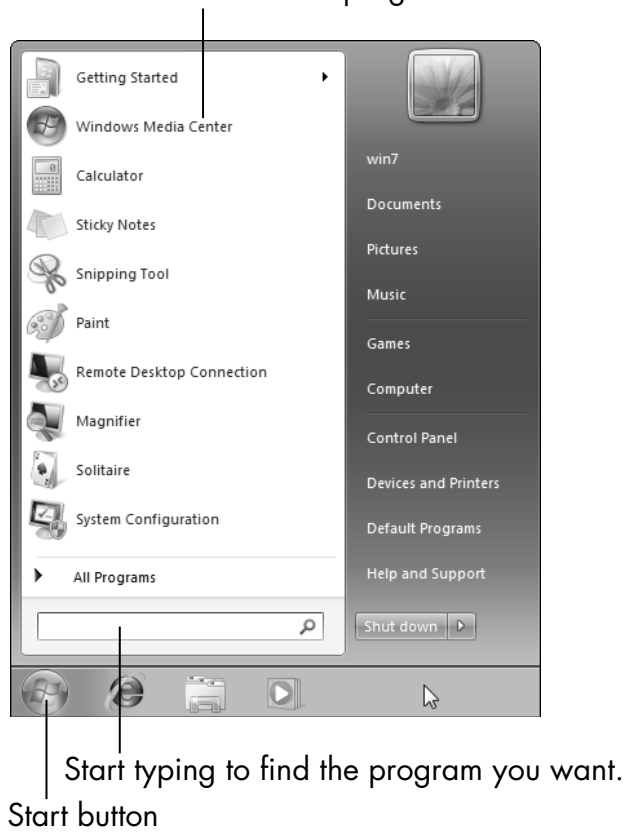

Figure 1-6

5. Click Back near the bottom of the All Programs menu to return to the first Start menu. You can also press the Esc (Escape) key to back up through the menus.

6. You don't have to dig through menus by clicking as you did in the preceding steps. Instead, you can type part of the name of the program you want to run. When the Start menu opens, the *cursor*, which is a vertical or horizontal line indicating where words you type will appear, is automatically in the box labeled Search Programs and Files. Start typing **solitaire**, and you see several programs listed, including the game Solitaire. Note that the game appears in the list as soon as you

type the letter **s**. By the time you type **sol**, Solitaire is at the top of the list. Click the Solitaire item to start the game. See Chapter 11 for information about Solitaire and other games.

You can perform most actions with the mouse, the keyboard, or a combination of the two. Another way to display the Start menu, for example, is to press the Windows logo key, which is located between the keys labeled Ctrl (Control) and Alt (Alternate) near the spacebar — the largest key on the keyboard. The Windows logo key has the same four-part flag icon as the Start menu (although not in color). From here on, I'll refer to this key as the *Win key*.

7. Tap and release the Win key to display the Start menu; tap the Win key a second time to remove the Start menu from the screen. If you want to run something else, you can type the name of the program you want and press Enter or click the program name. This is the easiest way to start any program you know the name of. You may need to type only a few letters to run a program.

See Chapter 15 for information on customizing the items that appear on the Start menu.

Learning keystroke shortcuts is especially valuable if you don't like using the mouse or other pointing device, which is a common complaint laptop users have about the touchpad.

Get Familiar with the Taskbar

1. The area at the bottom of the screen and to the right of the Start button is the *taskbar*, where you see icons for some programs. **Figure 1-7** shows four icons in the taskbar. The first three icons are for programs that aren't running (Microsoft Internet Explorer, Windows Explorer,

Media Player); the fourth icon is for Solitaire, which you started in the preceding task. The mouse hovers over Solitaire to display the thumbnail or the program name.

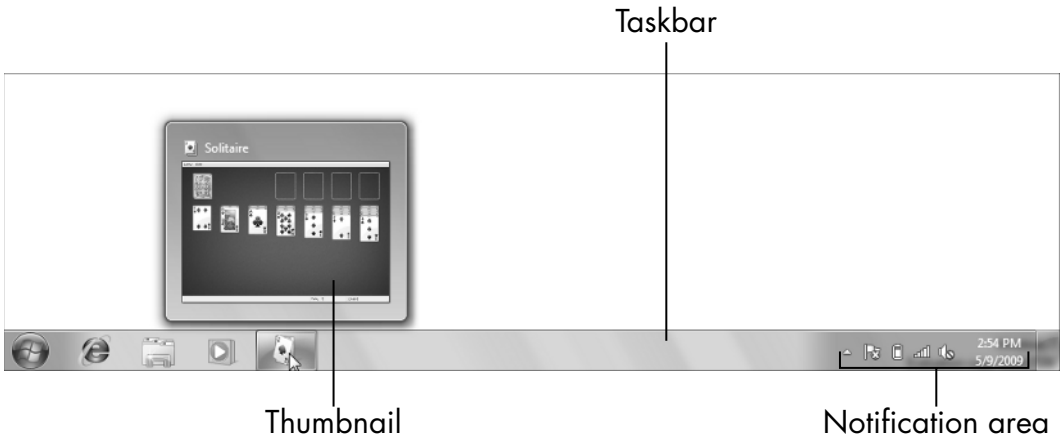

Figure 1-7

Use the taskbar as another way to run programs, in addition to the Start menu. You can use the taskbar to switch between programs by clicking the icon for the program you want to use.

2. Hover the mouse pointer over icons in the taskbar. For programs that are running, you may see a preview or *thumbnail* (small picture) of that program (refer to Figure 1-7).

Whether your computer has this capability depends, in part, on your edition of Windows 7. The Starter edition, for example, does not show thumbnails in the taskbar. This function also depends on your computer's graphics hardware, so you may not see taskbar thumbnails if you don't have the necessary hardware.

3. The right end of the taskbar is an area called the *Notification area* or *icon tray* (refer to Figure 1-7), which displays the current date and time, as well as icons for

other programs that run automatically when your computer starts. Messages called *notifications* pop up here from time to time. Get information about these icons by hovering the mouse pointer over them. Click any icon in the icon tray to open the associated program, and right-click an icon to see a menu of available options, such as those to change settings or exit the program.

Before too long, you see a pop-up notification in the icon tray to Activate Windows Now. Windows 7 needs to phone home to Microsoft to check in — that's activation. Ignore this message until you have an Internet connection. See Chapter 8 for information on connecting to the Internet and Chapter 17 for steps to activation.

To recap: Start a program by using the Start menu, icons on the desktop, or icons in the taskbar. Switch between programs you have started by clicking their icons in the taskbar.

Get Help When You Need It

1. Hover the mouse pointer over anything on the screen to see a pop-up box, or *tooltip*, with a brief explanation of the item.

2. Look for information on the screen. A How to Play box appears briefly when you start Solitaire, for example. The bottom edge of the screen, called the *status bar*, may display help text that changes as you highlight different items on the screen. Some screens display blue links you can click for more information.

3. Many programs, including the one shown in **Figure 1-8**, have a Help menu. Click the Help menu to see a list of help options. You can also press the F1 key near the top of your keyboard to see help information.

Click Help.

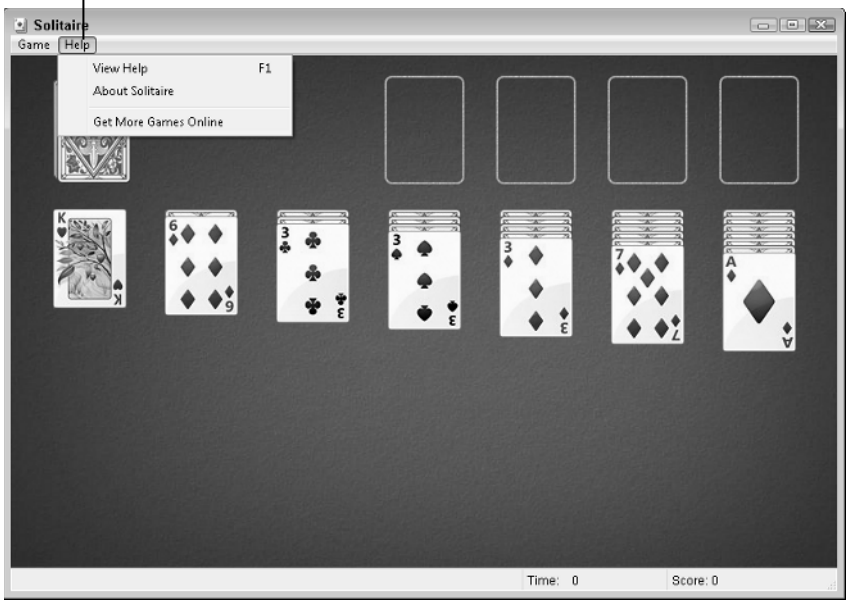

Figure 1-8

In most programs, choose Help➪About (this program) to find out the name and version number of the program. You may need the version number as you seek help elsewhere.

4. Choose Start➪Help and Support to start the Windows 7 Help program. Click blue links to see more information. Type a term you want help with in the Search Help box at the top of the Help window, and press the Enter key to search for that term. Try this by typing **taskbar** or **start menu**, for example. Search the Help and Support program for **what's new** if you have used Windows Vista or Windows XP (see **Figure 1-9**).

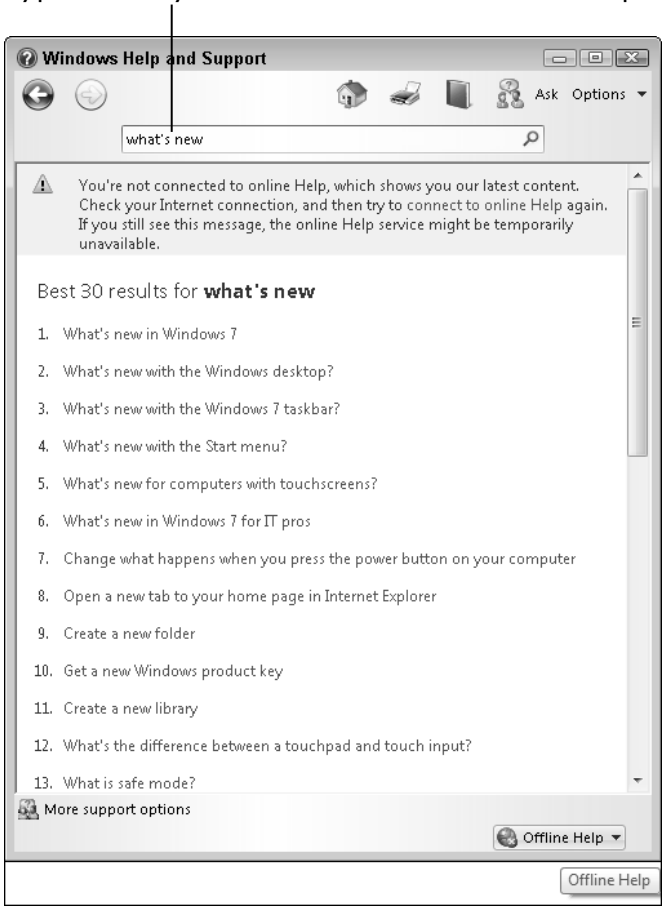
Type a term you want to find more about and press Enter.
Windows Help and Support
Ask
Options
what's new
You're not connected to online Help, which shows you our latest content. Check your Internet connection, and then try to connect to online Help again. If you still see this message, the online Help service might be temporarily unavailable.
Best 30 results for what's new
1. What's new in Windows 7
2. What's new with the Windows desktop?
3. What's new with the Windows 7 taskbar?
4. What's new with the Start menu?
5. What's new for computers with touchscreens?
6. What's new in Windows 7 for IT pros
7. Change what happens when you press the power button on your computer
8. Open a new tab to your home page in Internet Explorer
9. Create a new folder
10. Get a new Windows product key
11. Create a new library
12. What's the difference between a touchpad and touch input?
13. What is safe mode?
More support options
Offline Help
Offline Help

Figure 1-9

Close Windows 7

1. Although you can let Windows 7 run indefinitely, you probably want to turn your computer off if you aren't going to use it for a few hours. To see your options for turning the computer off, click the Start button to open the Start menu (refer to "Go with the Start Button," earlier in this chapter).

2. At the bottom of the Start menu, to the right of the box labeled Search Programs and Files, you see a button with

a triangle at its right end. This button usually displays Shut Down, although the button may be programmed to display another option.

3. The Shut Down button has other options, as shown in **Figure 1-10**. Click the triangle to the right of the button for these options. For now, these three options matter most (you may not have all of these):

- **Shut Down:** This option exits Windows 7 and saves power by turning the computer off. In exiting Windows 7, Shut Down closes any programs that are currently running.

Figure 1-10

- **Sleep:** This option reduces the computer's power consumption without exiting Windows 7 or closing programs. As a result, when you wake the computer by moving the mouse or touching the keyboard, everything is exactly as you left it: programs and documents are open, if they were before Sleep.

- **Hibernate:** This option combines Sleep and Shut Down. Hibernate records which programs are running but completely shuts down the computer. When you start the computer, Windows 7 opens all programs you were using, just like Sleep.

Hibernate or Shut Down are equally *green* options — they save the same amount of power. Sleep is a little less green, but saves time in returning to a task you're in the middle of.

4. Choose Shutdown to turn off the computer.

On most computers, pressing the power switch also shuts down the computer. On a laptop, closing the lid may shut down the laptop or put it into Sleep or Hibernation mode.

For a desktop computer, consider using a power strip to plug in the computer, the monitor, and the printer. After you shut down or hibernate the computer, turn the power strip off. This saves the most power.